



PRIMARY EDUCATION SOFTWARE

The computer is now an integral part of the primary school classroom. Janet Swift looks at 10 products aimed at both teachers and parents that can help your children get to the top of the class

The computer is now as important a piece of equipment in the classroom as books and pencils. Most children are introduced to computers at home or in the nursery, so for many youngsters the excitement of using a PC has waned by the time they arrive at primary school. The technology can still be fun, but it may also be frustrating and tedious, particularly for younger children. It all depends on the quality of the software. The right content, presented in a motivating and supportive manner, can provide the

extra individual attention that allows pupils to develop at their own pace.

Although whiteboards are not yet part of every primary school classroom – and certainly not part of every lesson – their popularity continues to grow. But, as the novelty of the technology wears off, will they simply gather dust in the corner? Again, it depends on the quality of the software. If it provides teachers with material they like, it can bring a new dimension to education and free them from a lot of repetitive tasks.

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The computer can also help monitor children's progress, providing feedback not just to pupils but also to teachers, who can quickly discover whether targets are being met.

In selecting software for this review we've looked for titles that should find a place in every primary school as a resource for teachers or pupils, but most of the packages can also be bought for home use. We've awarded ratings both on the quality of the content and the degree to which it brings enjoyment to the learning process.

REVIEW EDUCATION SOFTWARE AGE 7 TO 11

BBC/SHERSTON Where in the World is Barnaby Bear?

RATING ★★★★★

PRICE Home £20 inc VAT;

schools from £59 inc VAT

SUPPLIER Sherston 01666 843200

DETAILS www.sherston.co.uk

This program, based on the Barnaby Bear character from the BBC series, is designed to develop geographical awareness. Familiarity with the character is not essential, as Barnaby introduces the topics in a clear, straightforward way. There are six locations to visit, and activities involve planning the trip and sightseeing. Children can also explore the themes of journeys, weather, landscape, shopping and so on at the various destinations.

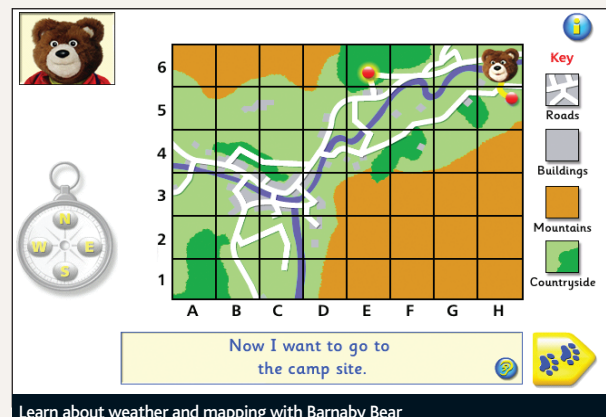
The software offers a good mix of information and interaction from the outset. The first activity is choosing the correct map – the world, Europe or the United Kingdom – and then estimating the distance to be travelled by measuring with a ruler and choosing an appropriate mode of transport.

Next, after hearing the week's weather forecast, the child has to pack a suitcase and hand luggage for the journey, choosing items that are appropriate for the type of holiday and the predicted weather conditions.

On arriving at the destination, children explore the landscape and go sightseeing, which introduces map skills. Pupils have to get Barnaby to the places he wants to visit by using the grid and compass directions. Transport is the next topic covered, with an I-spy activity and multiple choice questions.

Finally, the Shopping section involves matching items to the shops that sell them.

Where in the World is Barnaby Bear? is perfect for working with the whole class and is well-suited for use with interactive whiteboards as it provides plenty of scope for class discussion. It's equally suitable for small groups and individuals, and the creation of scrapbooks enables children to show their knowledge and understanding by adding text to pages that the program produces automatically. Each scrapbook can have up to 36 pages, and pupils can use them



Learn about weather and mapping with Barnaby Bear

to describe places and compare them while developing a geographical vocabulary. It also has potential for home use, and its overall attractiveness merits its high rating.

✓ Good introduction to geography with teacher and pupil appeal

✗ A bit repetitive if you visit every location in turn

REQUIREMENTS Windows 95 or later, 166MHz Pentium processor, 32MB RAM; 233MHz Power Mac G3, 32MB RAM



REVIEW EDUCATION SOFTWARE AGE 7 TO 11

SHERSTON
Crystal Rain Forest 2

RATING ★★★★★

PRICE Home £20 inc VAT;
schools from £70 inc VAT

SUPPLIER Sherston 01666 843200

DETAILS www.sherston.co.uk

Unusually for educational software, Crystal Rain Forest was so popular that it has spawned a sequel. The original title has been redesigned, partly to make it suitable for whiteboards and to add pupil tracking and recording facilities, but it also has extra activities and enhancements that make it more engaging for pupils.

The program introduces pupils to the Logo programming language through an adventure scenario set in an imaginary world where profiteers are cutting down the rainforests. The king tries to prevent this and is mortally wounded. Only magic crystals can save him, which must either be found in the rainforest or made by Professor Roberts and his computer.

The program has three modes. In Adventure Mode users watch an introduction and then work through 26 episodes until they reach the conclusion. By the end of the adventure children will not only be familiar with Logo, they will also be able to write routines and complete programs. Activity Mode lets pupils access 12 different Logo tasks of increasing difficulty, and Demonstration Mode allows teachers to demonstrate Logo concepts to the whole class.

The Teacher's options screen enables users to disable narration if it isn't required and change the skill level. The Talking Logo feature can also be switched off, but this is valuable as it enunciates a Logo command as it is performed. The CD includes Crystal Logo, a Logo tool that enables pupils to write programs from scratch.

The environmental theme of the adventure adds cross-curricular potential as well as providing motivation for tackling each of the tasks. This is high-quality classroom software, but Logo's limitations as a programming language mean it doesn't quite get a five-star rating.

✓ Excellent introduction to Logo

✗ Logo is a programming language without a future

REQUIREMENTS Windows 95 or later, 233MHz Pentium processor, 64MB RAM; Mac OS X, 233MHz Power Mac G3, 32MB RAM



Use Logo to find magic crystals and save the king and the planet in this rainforest adventure

REVIEW EDUCATION SOFTWARE AGE 7 TO 11

SHERSTON
Arcventure:
The Vikings

RATING ★★★★★

PRICE Home £20 inc VAT; schools £59 inc VAT

SUPPLIER Sherston 01666 843200

DETAILS www.sherston.co.uk

The Vikings is part of a series of three history programs that cover different periods for Key Stage 2 pupils, using the scenario of an archaeological dig. The other two programs look at the Ancient Egyptians and the Romans and Britons in the 1st century AD. In all three titles, the challenge in Adventure mode is to excavate as many artefacts as possible.

Before pupils embark on the adventure they meet Finn, the archaeologist who acts as their guide, and are shown the dig site. The program is based on a real excavation that took place in York in the late 1970s and early 1980s and revealed the Viking settlement of Jorvic and artefacts from the 10th century.

Pupils have four tools – a spade, a trowel, a soft brush and a magnifying glass – and must use each one at the appropriate time, taking care not to damage the artefacts. When they find an object, they can use the database to see a reconstruction of it. Some artefacts are not in the database, and if you find one of these you travel back in time to talk to the people who lived there and ask them about their lives and the unknown object. This teaches the pupils a great deal about the historical period, and a journal feature lets them record their progress.

In Time Traveller mode, children go straight to this stage without needing to uncover any artefacts first. Here the challenge is to identify objects; the program offers Easy and Hard levels, each of which has three artifacts.

The User Guide and Educational Notes give teachers the solutions to all six problems.

This title is excellent and suitable for both home and classroom use, so it wins our Best Buy award.

✓ Combines engaging interactivity with factual content

✗ No incentive to repeat a task once you've completed it

REQUIREMENTS Windows 95 or later, 233MHz Pentium processor, 64MB RAM; Mac OS X, 233MHz Power Mac G3, 32MB RAM



Explore the Viking Settlement of Jorvik and talk to its inhabitants to learn about life and artifacts

REVIEW EDUCATION SOFTWARE AGE 7 TO 14

NEPTUNE
COMPUTER
TECHNOLOGY
The Tudor Trail

RATING ★★★

PRICE Home £35 inc VAT;
schools from £41 inc VAT

SUPPLIER Neptune 01935 891892

DETAILS www.neptunect.co.uk

This history resource is designed for Key Stages 2 and 3 and presents a comprehensive narrated timeline of the period 1457 to 1603. It includes details not only of the English monarchs but also the politicians, clerics, foreign rulers and other major personalities of the period. The Tudor Life section covers social history – houses, clothing and so on – and its historic events include the Battle of Bosworth, the Babington Plot and the Spanish Armada.

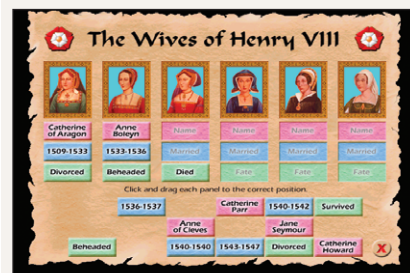
The program includes plenty of interactive content to reinforce learning, including a word search for key names, a muddled family tree to rearrange and a maze to negotiate while answering questions about Henry VIII's marriages. The Armada quiz is a good way of learning names and dates and is bound to be a favourite in the Key Stage 2 classroom; as when contestants get every answer correct an English ship defeats a Spanish ship accompanied by the sound of explosions.

The Babington Cipher activity is a practical exercise that demonstrates how codes are used. The Activities menu also has a two-player game, Merelles, that is fun to play and could be used as a reward in the Key Stage 2 classroom context. Teachers will find additional material for classroom and homework activities in the Resources menu, including printable worksheets. A high proportion of the material is narrated, making it accessible from the start of Key Stage 2, while additional content is available for more able students to read for themselves.

✓ Straightforward and consistent presentation with plenty of relevant activities

✗ Covers Key Stages 2 and 3 in a single product

REQUIREMENTS Windows 95 or later, 200MHz Pentium processor, 16MB RAM; Mac OS 8.5 or later, Power PC, 16MB RAM



History becomes interactive as pupils are asked to put Henry VIII's marriages in order

REVIEW EDUCATION SOFTWARE AGE 6 TO 8

GRANADA LEARNING Simulation Explorer

RATING ★★★★★

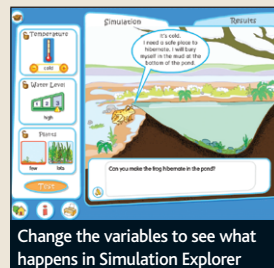
PRICE Home £20 inc VAT; schools from £58 inc VAT

SUPPLIER www.onestopeducation.co.uk

DETAILS www.granada-learning.com

The curriculum requires children to be familiar with the concept of computer simulation. This program meets Key Stage 2 requirements in this respect, as well as developing scientific and mathematical skills.

It has six simulations, each with two levels. In each activity – growing an alien plant, tooth decay, braking distance, pond habitat, throwing snowballs and a simple electrical circuit with a bulb – pupils experiment by changing variables and clicking Test to see what happens. Questions help to guide this experimental phase. When they feel they understand the effects of the variables, pupils can click the Challenge button. This asks a series of questions, and pupils set the controls to obtain specific results. When they have answered these correctly, they can print a certificate to show the level achieved.



✓ An interesting and varied range of activities

✗ No pupil login, so it can't provide individual feedback

REQUIREMENTS Windows 98 SE or later, 500MHz Pentium III processor, 128MB RAM; Mac OS X, Power Mac G4, 256MB RAM

REVIEW EDUCATION SOFTWARE AGE 7 TO 9

GRANADA LEARNING Cornerstones for Writing

RATING ★★★★★

PRICE Home £20 inc VAT; schools from £58 inc VAT

SUPPLIER www.onestopeducation.co.uk

DETAILS www.granada-learning.com

This program for Years 3 and 4 has been designed for the classroom, with whiteboard-friendly navigation and facilities for monitoring, reviewing and commenting on children's work, but would be equally valuable for home use.

Six characters introduce writing tasks at two levels. Younger users are asked to write a story with a familiar setting, a non-chronological report and a traditional tale among other things, while older pupils tackle a historical story, a newspaper-style report, a poem and so on.

Each task includes an example. Pupils can work alone or get help from one of the characters, who guide them through the process of making notes. These are converted into a draft by adding sentence structure and then revised and edited.



✓ A well-produced resource to develop writing ability

✗ The structure may inhibit creativity

REQUIREMENTS Windows 95 or later, 233MHz Pentium processor, 64MB RAM; 233MHz Power Mac G3, 64MB RAM



REVIEW EDUCATION SOFTWARE AGE 7 TO 9

GRANADA LEARNING

10 Minute Multiplication & Division Tasks

RATING ★★★★★

PRICE Home £20 inc VAT;

schools from £58 inc VAT

SUPPLIER www.onestopeducation.co.ukDETAILS www.granada-learning.com

One advantage of letting the computer take on the role of teacher is that pupils can get instant feedback. Another is that it enables pupils to work at their own pace. If they are struggling with arithmetic, for example, the computer can repeat an explanation as often as required without ever showing impatience.

This title, together with a similar program for addition and subtraction, is designed to build basic arithmetic skills with highly focused tasks. It uses attractive graphics and sound and its theme of creepy crawlies is designed both to motivate pupils to use the software and to help them understand how to get to grips with arithmetic operations.

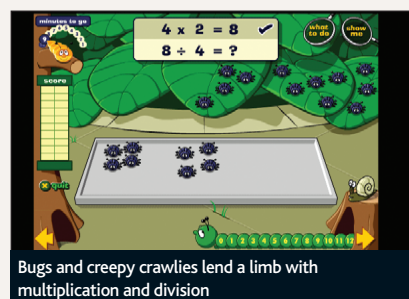
As you might guess from the name of the software, each activity is short. The program provides plenty of praise for correct answers and immediate access to help when a pupil makes repeated mistakes. The quality of the explanations provided is very high.

The software is designed for use in the classroom and enables teachers to monitor pupils' progress. However, it's equally suitable for use at home to help children build up their confidence. The software's 'What to do' section gives instructions on how to carry out the required tasks and all the activities have 'Show me' options that introduce the relevant mathematical concepts in terms that are easy to understand. Printable worksheets are included for each of the 15 activities and answer sheets are also provided. These can be viewed and printed from the password-protected Teacher Setup section of the program.

✓ High-quality explanations of techniques for multiplication and division

✗ Not exactly the ideal birthday present

REQUIREMENTS Windows 95 or later, Pentium 600MHz processor, 64MB RAM; Power Mac 64MB RAM



REVIEW EDUCATION SOFTWARE AGE 7 TO 11

THE TIMES

Ace Monkey

RATING ★★★★★

PRICE Home £8.90 inc VAT;

schools £68 inc VAT

SUPPLIER www.amazon.co.ukDETAILS www.onestopeducation.co.uk

We looked at the maths and English titles in this series, which features bright graphics and lots of encouragement. The maths program covers a wide range of activities, beginning with counting, odd and even numbers and number patterns. More advanced topics such as comparatives, fractions and 2D and 3D shapes are introduced with concise but helpful explanations, and questions test pupils' understanding. Ace Monkey uses a grid of 100 numbers to explain addition and subtraction, which will help children who find these topics difficult. Multiplication is explained as an alternative to adding numbers repeatedly, and division is explained by sharing items. Pupils enter answers through an onscreen number pad, which eliminates typing.

The English title for ages 7-11 uses a similar format with plenty of enjoyable activities that cover spelling, punctuation, grammar and so on, each with an easy and a hard task. For example, the alphabet exercises include sorting upper- and lower-case letters and putting words into alphabetical order. In the reading exercises, pupils put muddled instructions for a banana milkshake in order and identify the correct homophone in a sentence, such as 'there', 'their' or 'they're'.

One problem with this title is the fact that Ace Monkey pops up between each answer. It's meant to be encouraging, but for brighter kids it simply slows the pace. After each completed task pupils can choose to print a certificate or play a game. Four more games in the Fun House reinforce the skills being practised.

The age ranges for these titles seem very wide. In content and approach they span Key Stages 1 and 2, and a more realistic age range would be 6-9. However, they will also help struggling 10- and 11-year-olds and are highly suitable for home use.

✓ Combination of good content and a highly motivating environment

✗ Ace Monkey's voice is irritating

REQUIREMENTS Windows 95 or later, Pentium II processor, 128MB RAM; Mac Power PC G3, 64MB RAM



REVIEW EDUCATION SOFTWARE AGE 5 TO 9

FOCUS MULTIMEDIA

JoJo Learning Maths



RATING ★★★★★

PRICE £9.99 inc VAT

SUPPLIER Focus Multimedia 01889 579977

DETAILS www.focusmm.co.uk

This two-disc set features two separate adventures designed to help children develop maths skills in the company of JoJo, a small and rather helpless animal character. In the first, for five- to seven-year-olds, JoJo goes through a magical doorway and finds herself in Numberland, where she is trapped by an evil character called Shiver. JoJo turns to Lucky, a creature with a bushy tail who becomes her amusing and supportive guide. Adults will recognise the voice of Lenny Henry and children will be motivated by his encouraging words.

In the first game children store nuts in numbered compartments; this involves counting from 1 to 30. The next game is more difficult: children have to cross stepping stones by identifying the next number in a sequence that crosses the 'tens' boundary. After that JoJo and Lucky reach TenTown to face three more activities with the overall theme of place value.

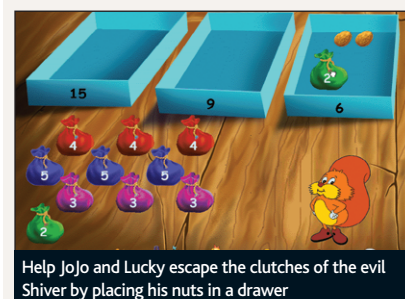
In JoJo's second adventure, for seven- to nine-year-olds, Shiver captures JoJo's dog Bobbin and takes him to his dungeon in Numberland. JoJo asks Lucky for help and in return helps him with tasks that involve collecting and sharing – or multiplication and division. Children use a map to access the eight different games. Each game exercises skills that are fundamental to understanding arithmetic, and they progress in difficulty from simple to advanced.

This software is aimed at home users, so it lacks the facilities normally found in classroom software. The Rewards screen lets you view a user's achievements and you can choose between three difficulty levels, but there is no way to monitor several pupils at once.

✓ Attractive use of characters and graphics

✗ Exhibits some synchronisation problems on fast PCs; no multi-user monitoring

REQUIREMENTS Windows 95 or later, 166MHz Pentium processor, 32MB RAM



REVIEW EDUCATION SOFTWARE AGE 6 TO 9

SHERSTON Badger Trails

RATING ★★☆☆

PRICE Home £20 inc VAT; schools £59 inc VAT

SUPPLIER Sherston 01666 843200

DETAILS www.sherston.co.uk

In this program, a badger cub is mistakenly transported miles away from its sett when it wanders into a horse box in search of food. Pupils must help him return home using their knowledge of badgers and their habits.

They do this by using a map to plot a course back to the badger's sett and helping him find the food and drink he needs before he can make the journey. There are a number of dangers to avoid on the way, such as man, dogs, other badgers, traffic and fast-moving rivers.

The program is intended as a resource for various areas of the curriculum, including science, life processes, mapping, compass work and literacy skills. It is suitable both for class discussions and small group work. Unfortunately, there's no photography or film footage of badgers, which is disappointing.



Take on the role of a lost badger and survive the journey home

✓ Interesting cross-curricular resource for whole class and group work

✗ Storyline lacks film footage or photos of real badgers

REQUIREMENTS Windows 95 or later, 166MHz Pentium processor, 32MB RAM; Mac OS 8.1 or later, Power PC, 32MB RAM

REVIEW EDUCATION SOFTWARE AGE 5 PLUS

FOCUS MULTIMEDIA Excelling at spelling

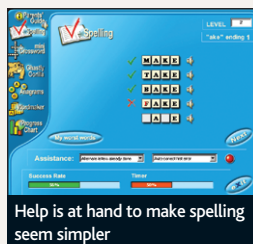
RATING ★★★★★

PRICE £9.99 inc VAT

DETAILS www.focusmm.co.uk

This program is refreshingly honest and doesn't try to hide its goal of expanding vocabulary and achieving accurate spelling. Although the box states Key Stage 1, 2 and 3 (ages five to 13) it actually goes beyond this. The program has 10 levels of increasing difficulty, and a list of 'My Worst Words' gives the pupil plenty of practice in problem areas. The program's database contains over 3,500 words, and you can add more, although you'll need a microphone to add the pronunciation and verbal clues.

Activities include Spelling, where you hear a word and its meaning and type letters into the boxes, crosswords, anagrams, a version of hangman and Wordmaker, where a word is displayed and you score points for making as many other words as possible from its letters. A Progress Chart, Parents' Guide and Teacher Mode round off this polished software, which is suitable for the classroom and the home. **CS**



Help is at hand to make spelling seem simpler

✓ A fun way for children to improve their spelling

✗ Age range really goes up to adult

REQUIREMENTS Windows 95 or later, Pentium 166MHz processor, 32MB RAM